

# **Different Types of Sexual Harassment in Society and its Relationship with Level of Sexual Norm Acceptance and Presence in Public Places (Case study: Female College Students in Islamic Azad University, Shiraz Branch)**

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## **Abstract**

Women victimization and harassment by men are the consequences of inequality between men and women in which they create a considerable number of problems for society. One type of harassment that women face in different forms in various societies is “street harassment” or “sexual harassment in society” including verbal and nonverbal behaviors such as whistling, blinking, ogling, pinching, touching the body, booing, and street remarks (wisecrack). Street remarks usually have sexual nature and they are some comments about physical appearance of women or their presence in public places. This paper was intended to study the women experience of different types of sexual harassment in public places and its relationship with acceptance level of sexual norms in public places using survey method on 369-individual sample among female college students in Islamic Azad University of Shiraz selected through stratified sampling. The results of step-by-step regression indicate that two variables including presence in public places and acceptance level of sexual norms were found to have the highest effect on experience of sexual harassment.

**Keywords:** sexual harassment in society, sexual norm acceptance, presence in public places, women.

## **Introduction**

Women victimization and harassment by men are the consequences of inequality between men and women in which they create a considerable number of problems for society. One type of harassment that women face in different forms in various societies is “sexual harassment in public places”. This topic has mainly been ignored from the perspective of academics, judges, and legislators as an issue that requires legal research and coverage. However, sexual harassments tease women in all environments and in particular in public places and prevent comprehensive, free, and active presence in public fields which leads to personality growth and self-confidence creation for human beings.

Sexual harassments include touching, coddling, staring and sneaking, telling jokes or wisecrack or expression considered as sexual proposition, persistent invitation or request for sexual action, showing pornographic posters or pictures or cartoons, and unnecessary familiarity such as brushing up (Foulice and McCabe, 1997)

Sexual harassments might be highlighted more in countries with more traditional sexual role approach (Sigal & Jacobsen, 1999: 769). Iranian society is not an exception as society with deep roots of sexual traditions and ideologies. Security in public places is considered as one of the most important civil rights. The basic explanation of freedom is individual's right to go to public places selected by himself. In fact, this type of freedom is essential and necessary for participation in civil

affairs. According to John Lock's statement, freedom means getting rid of restraints and violence by others which is not possible in places without law. Women's liberation has been restricted by sexual harassments by strangers in field of liberation from restraints. This is because this type of harassment has limited their physical and geographical movement and it prevents their presence in public places. In this regard, sexual harassment is female ghettoization (Boumen, 1993: 520). Studying street harassment is important in two aspects: first, street harassments are more popular than sexual harassments in working places and universities according to results of studies of many researchers (Fairchild, 2007; Mac Millan et al. 2000; and Lenton et al. 1999). Findings of Mac Millan et al (2000) research indicate the fact that 85% of female have faced one type of sexual armaments. However, 51% of female experienced harassments of non-strangers. Second, negative street harassments is far more extensive in personal and social level compared to sexual harassments in working places and universities. It is safe to say that no national and scientific researches were conducted concerning sexual harassment dimensions (or probably the researcher was not able to find such researches). Thus, the nature of each phenomenon needs to be discovered in prior to the reasons. The general objective of this paper is to see what are different types of sexual harassments in our society and to what extent they are popular. Then, we will study the acceptance level of sexual norms and level of presence in public fields.

### **Research literature**

Few researches has been done concerning the field of sexual harassment. One of them is qualitative study entitled "sexual harassment for women in different working places" conducted by Zokae (2005) for National Youth Organization. According to these interviews, sexual harassment occurrence is more in public transportation systems including touching harassment and wisecrack. The reactions of women include from silence to handbag and binders as barrier to warn. It usually leads to insults and threats in case the men do not follow rules.

The paper entitled "sexual harassment tolerance: a laboratory paradigm" conducted by Angelone et al. (2008) studied the relationship between individuals' attitudes toward sexual harassment, harassing person's charm and location as effective factors on tolerance of people against sexual harassment. The population consists of 128 female college students aged 18 to 25 years old. The results of the study showed that social attractiveness and status of harassing person as well as individuals' attitudes toward sexual harassment rise sexual harassment tolerance probability by female community.

Fairchild and Rudman (2008) in a study entitled "everyday harassment of strangers and women instrumentalism" claimed that sexual harassment of strangers is a phenomenon frequently being faced by young women in their everyday lives and it leaves unpleasant effects on their health. Second, sexual harassment and self-instrumentalism were found to have positive relationship with women instrumentalism. In addition, female who are scared of rape will most likely limit their transportation.

Parish et al. (2006) in a paper entitled "women sexual harassment in urban environments of China" analyzed sexual harassment prevalence and dangers in China in 2000 using Chinese family life survey data and health. The results of this paper indicate that 12.5% of all Chinese women and 15.1 of urban Chinese women had experienced one type of sexual harassment in previous year.

### **Theoretical framework of the study**

In qualitative papers, analyzing a social phenomenon is not possible without its theoretical support. This is because research questions and hypotheses are based on opinions in which the researcher tries to test them. (Creswell, 2003: 119). In theoretical frame, this paper takes advantage of social interaction, stereotypes, and gender socialization theories.

Social interaction theory : Erving Goffman (1963; 1971) was one of the first researchers who discussed about public and semipublic places. He argued that “civil inattention” is the basic expectation among strangers in public places. (Linton et al., 1999). According to this rule, unfamiliar people do not stare at each other in public places but might have a brief look at each other and pass next to each other. Staring at a stranger is known as one of cultural taboos. (Boumen, 1993). What directs men toward sexual harassment is the fact that men have learnt that civil inattention does not need to be necessarily followed against women. Thus, they easily violate it and this is one of power effect given to men by society.

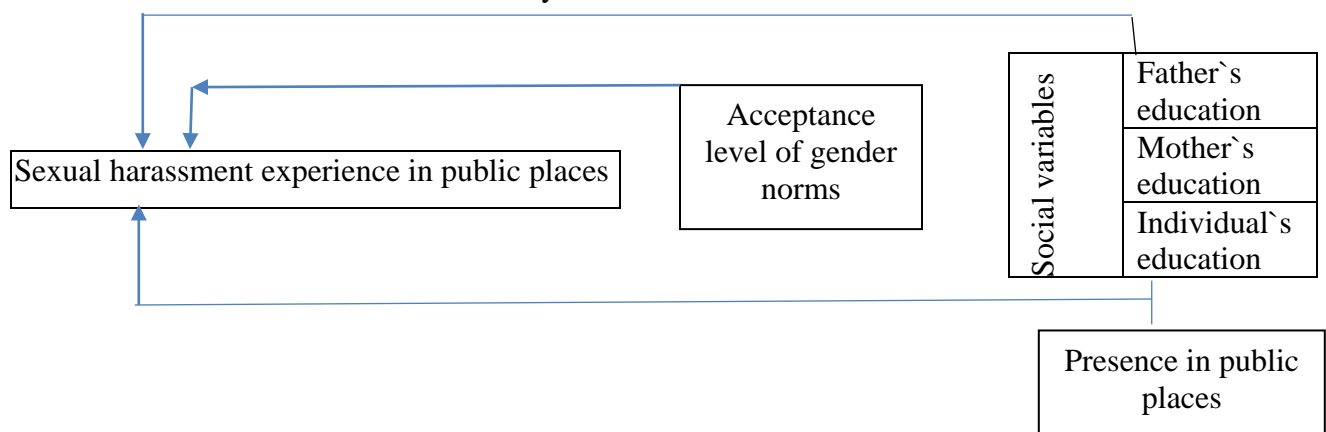
Stereotype theory : Burgess and Borgida (1999) can be named among the theorists of this theory (Fairchild, 2007). The most popular definition for stereotype is that: common beliefs about the attributes of a group of people, usually personality traits of a group of people, but they usually involve behaviors as well (Leyens et al., 1994; quoted from Garousi 2005:68). Psychologists divided stereotypes into two categories: descriptive (expectations from group members) and prescriptive (beliefs about how group members need to be). Gender ideologies are prescriptive ones which involve gender stereotypes as well as wider ideas about the proper roles of men and women in society. (Crosby et al., 2007: 159)

Gender socialization theory : Judith Butler takes the center stage among contemporary gender theory and gender socialization theorists. He, in his book *Gender Trouble* (1990), rejects the opinion that gender differences are rooted in our biological and psychological nature and claims that these differences were created as a result of random social actions, so they can be reconstructed in another way (Alsop, 2002: 64).

Butler proposed that gender is socially made and men and women behavior difference is due to gender socialization difference. Socialization refers to processes in which people adapt themselves with appropriately-considered behaviors in their culture. Socialization is usually used in accordance with children; those who gradually learn consistency with proper and acceptable behavior in a variety of different social situations. However, we should not forget that our socialization, indeed, never ends even our behaviors as adults are balanced by social pressures and expectations (Bar, 2004: 59).

### The empirical research model

As it can be seen in Fig. 1, the effects of social variables and the level of presence in public places on sexual harassment were designed. The acceptance level of gender norms is also included as interface cultural variable influenced by social variables in the model.



**Figure 1: Research empirical model**

### Research hypotheses

1. There is a relationship between father`s education and acceptance level of gender norms.
2. There is a relationship between mother`s education and acceptance level of gender norms.
3. There is a relationship between individual`s education and acceptance level of gender norms.
4. There is a relationship between father`s education and level of sexual harassment experience in public field.
5. There is a relationship between mother`s education and level of sexual harassment experience in public field.
6. There is a relationship between individual`s education and level of sexual harassment experience in public field.
7. There is a relationship between acceptance level of gender norms and level of sexual harassment experience in public field.
8. There is a relationship between presence in public places and level of sexual harassment experience in public field.

### Methodology

In this paper, quantitative method, survey technique, and questionnaires were used. The survey was a cross-sectional at a certain time. Alpha Cronbach was used to obtain research validity. It was reported at acceptable level of 0.90 and 0.75 for level of sexual harassment experience and acceptance spectrum of gender norms, respectively. According to statistics provided by educational automation system in 2006, the population of female college students was reported 10311 in Islamic Azad University of Shiraz. To determine sample volume, Cochran formula was used. As a result, total number of 369 students were selected. Data were analyzed by SPSS after collection and transferring to the computer.

### Research findings

Research descriptive statistics indicate the fact that 64.5% were studying at B.S. level, however, 26.6%, and 5.7% were studying at M.S. level and Ph.D. level, respectively. Concerning marital status, 85.7 % were single and 13.8 were married. As much as 24.4% used long coverage or long chadors, while 75.3% used common or short chadors. As much as 19.8% were without cosmetics; 50.9% had light cosmetics; 28.2% had medium cosmetics; and 8% used heavy makeup. Also, responders` ages were between 18 to 25 years old and the mean was 22.08.

An exploratory study was conducted to discover all types of street harassment being experienced by women and their occurrences. Therefore, the researcher selected 20 female students in Islamic Azad University of Shiraz by in-depth interview technique concerning sexual harassment in public places.

#### *The spectrum of sexual harassment experience in public places*

Table 1 shows frequency distribution and %age of items for each of sexual harassment experience. This spectrum includes 13 items. Each item questions one kind of sexual harassment in public places. Scores of each item ranges between 1 and 5. Score 1 shows lack of harassment experience and score 5 shows high level of sexual harassment in public places. Total sum of 13 items shows the level of sexual harassment experiences which can fluctuate between 13(minimum) and 65(maximum). As it is closer to 13, it reflects minor experience of harassment. As it is closer to 65, it shows high level of harassment experience. If an individual chooses "sometimes" for all items, the total sum will be 39.

**Table 1: Frequency distribution of items related to sexual harassment experience**

	Items	Never (1)	Rarely (2)	Sometimes (3)	Most often (4)	Always (5)	Mean	Mean
Visual harassments	1. Have any men stared at you in that you feel uncomfortable?	11 3%	59 16%	173 46.9%	106 28.7%	20 5.4%	3.18	2.75
	2. Have any men glanced your body in that you feel uncomfortable?	52 14.1%	89 24.1%	151 40.9%	62 16.8%	13 3.5%	2.71	
	3. Have any men shown you insulting and dirty gestures?	80 19.5%	126 34.1%	122 33.1%	31 8.4%	10 2.7%	2.36	
Verbal harassments	4. Have any men ever whistled or booed for you?	72 19.5%	127 34.4%	120 32.5%	37 10%	11 3%	2.42	2.39
	5. Have any men ever tried to give you telephone number?	67 18.2%	109 29.5%	129 35%	49 13.3%	15 4.1%	2.56	
	6. Have any men ever complimented (wisecrack) you on your clothes?	54 14.6%	80 21.7%	138 37.4%	81 22%	16 4.3%	2.80	
	7. Have any men made fun of you by wisecracking on your clothes or appearance?	58 23%	136 36.9%	120 32.5%	23 6.2%	4 1.1%	2.25	
	8. Have any men wisecracked you by insulting words?	130 35.2%	149 40.4%	68 18.4%	16 4.3%	3 8%	1.94	
Chase	9. Have any men chased you in pavements?	101 27.4%	134 36.3%	111 30.1%	18 4.9%	3 8%	1.15	1.72
	10. Have any men chased you by car or asked you to get on?	93 26.6%	118 32%	101 27.4%	45 12.2%	6 1.6%	2.30	
Touching harassments	11. Have any men jostled you?	47 12.7%	127 34.4%	132 35.8%	52 14.1%	10 2.7%	2.60	2.42
	12. Have any men tried to touch you by hand or touched?	120 32.5%	147 39.8%	82 22.2%	13 3.5%	3 0.8%	1.99	
	13. Have you ever happened sitting next to a man in taxi that he did not provide you enough space for sitting or sitting too close to you that you feel uncomfortable?	54 14.6%	102 27.6%	137 37.1%	63 17.1%	13 3.5%	2.67	
	Total						30.93	

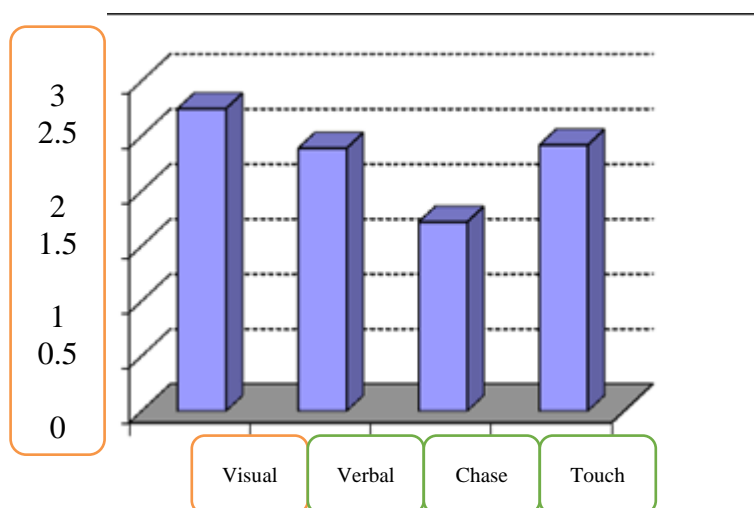
According to research literature concerning sexual harassment in public places, subjective meanings, and experiences of participants in in-depth interviews, it is obvious that sexual harassments fall into four groups: visual harassments, verbal harassments, chase, and touch harassments.

Table 1 shows the way of selecting options in various items. As it can be seen, in item 1, “Has a man ever stared at you in such a way that you feel uncomfortable?” the mean was 3.18 out of 5, meaning that a considerable number of responders selected “most often” or “always” and showing high experience level of this type of harassment among them.

The lowest was reported for item 9, “Has a man ever chased and followed on your way?” It stood at 1.15 out of 5, meaning that a considerable number of responders selected “never” or

“rarely”. Thus, this type of harassment, following or chasing, has far fewer occurrences compared to other types of street harassments.

In terms of general harassment classification, based on table 1, it is claimed that the highest mean (2.75) belongs to visual harassment. Then, touch harassment and verbal harassment scored the second and the third with a slight difference with mean of 2.42 and 2.39, respectively. Finally, the lowest mean of harassment experience was reported for chasing or following with mean of 1.72. If we separate following with cars and walking, mean chase with car is just twice as much as chase by walking, 2.30 opposed to 1.15. In this paper, the mean of all items was reported 30.93 which is less than mean score of all items (39). Figure 2 shows mean of female experience from different types of sexual harassments.



**Figure 2: Mean of all types of sexual harassment experience**

### *Testing hypotheses*

H1: Father's education was found to have relationship with acceptance level of gender norms.

Pearson correlation coefficient ( $r = -0.12$ ) shows negative direction and reverse relationship of these two variables. Since  $\text{Sig.} = 0.01$  is significant, this hypothesis is approved.

**Table 2: Pearson coefficient test for father's education and acceptance level of gender norms**

Variable	r	Sig	N
Father's education	-0.12	0.01	355

H2: mother's education was found to have relationship with acceptance level of gender norms.

Pearson correlation coefficient ( $r = -0.13$ ) shows negative direction and reverse relationship of these two variables. Since  $\text{Sig.} = 0.00$  is significant, this hypothesis is approved.

**Table 3: Pearson coefficient test for mother's education and acceptance level of gender norms**

Variable	r	Sig	N
Mother's education	-0.13	0.00	358

H3: individual's education was found to have relationship with acceptance level of gender norms.

Pearson correlation coefficient ( $r = -0.12$ ) shows negative direction and reverse relationship of these two variables. Since  $\text{Sig.} = 0.01$  is significant, this hypothesis is approved.



**Table 4: Pearson coefficient test for individual`s education and acceptance level of gender norms**

Variable	r	Sig	N
Education	-0.12	0.01	355

H4: father`s education was found to have relationship with level of sexual harassment experience in public places.

Pearson correlation coefficient ( $r = 0.03$ ) shows positive direction and direct relationship of these two variables. Since  $\text{Sig.} = 0.47$  is significant, this hypothesis is rejected.

**Table 5: Pearson coefficient test for father`s education and level of sexual harassment experience**

Variable	r	Sig	N
Father`s education	0.03	0.47	342

H5: mother`s education was found to have relationship with level of sexual harassment experience in public places.

Pearson correlation coefficient ( $r = 0.11$ ) shows positive direction and direct relationship of these two variables. Since  $\text{Sig.} = 0.03$  is significant, this hypothesis is approved.

**Table 6: Pearson coefficient test for father`s education and level of sexual harassment experience**

Variable	r	Sig	N
Mother`s education	0.11	0.03	344

H6: individual`s education was found to have relationship with level of sexual harassment experience in public places.

Pearson correlation coefficient ( $r = -0.05$ ) shows negative direction and reverse relationship of these two variables. Since  $\text{Sig.} = 0.33$  is significant, this hypothesis is rejected.

**Table 7: Pearson coefficient test for education and level of sexual harassment experience**

Variable	r	Sig	N
Education	-0.05	0.33	342

H7: acceptance level of gender norms was found to have relationship with level of sexual harassment experience in public places.

Pearson correlation coefficient ( $r = -0.16$ ) shows negative direction and reverse relationship of these two variables. Since  $\text{Sig.} = 0.01$  is significant, this hypothesis is approved.

**Table 8: Pearson coefficient test for acceptance level of gender norms and level of sexual harassment experience**

Variable	r	Sig	N
Acceptance level of gender norms	-0.16	0.00	352

H8: presence in public places was found to have relationship with sexual harassment experience in public places.

To study the relationship between presence in public places and sexual harassment experience, r Pearson test was used. According to the results, weak correlation ( $r = 0.16$ ) was found between presence in public places and sexual harassment experience. Pearson coefficient of  $r = 0.16$  shows positive direction and direct relationship of these two variables. Since  $\text{Sig.} = 0.00$  is significant, this hypothesis is approved at confidence level of .995.

**Table 9: Pearson coefficient test for presence in public places and level of sexual harassment experience**

Variable	r	Sig	N
Presence in public places	0.16	0.00	354

***Testing research structural model***

To examine experimental model, path analysis technique and step-by-step multivariate regression method were used to calculate path coefficients.

**Table 10: Step-by-step multivariate regression method to study the simultaneous effect of independent and interface variables on sexual harassment experience in public places**

Step	Variable	B	Beta	T value	Sig.	R2
1	Presence in public places	5.02	0.25	4.70	0.00	0.10
2	Acceptance level of gender norms	-4.95	-0.25	3.71	0.00	0.12

**Discussion and conclusion**

Sexual harassment in public places is one of obvious forms of gender discrimination seen in most communities except for villages and few societies where women are not allowed to appear in public places.

The objective of this paper is to study the effect of acceptance level of gender norms and level of presence in public places on sexual harassment experience in public places. To this end, the acceptance level of gender norms was evaluated by Doyle and Paludi standard spectrum of gender norm acceptance. The effect of father's and mother's education as well as individual's education, as social variables, were studied on sexual harassment experience.

In this paper, eight hypotheses were raised. Out of this number, 6 were approved and 2 were rejected. The level of presence in public places and acceptance level of sexual norms were two variables studied as effective cultural variables on level of sexual harassment experience. The relationship of both variables was significant. In terms of sexual harassment acceptance, as it was stated earlier,  $r$  is -0.16, meaning that negative and reverse relationship was found between this variable and level of sexual harassment experience. In other words, the less likely as woman adhere to gender norms, the less likely she will behave in accordance with gender stereotypes, so she will experience more incidence of sexual harassment in public places. This finding is in accordance with theory of stereotypes as well as theory of mutual action. The positive and significant relationship between level of presence in public places and level of sexual harassment experience in public places ( $r = -0.16$ , Sig. = 0.00) can be justified according to this issue. However, gender norm acceptance was found to have reverse and significant relationship with father's education ( $r = -0.12$ , sig. = 0.01), mother's education ( $r = -0.13$ , Sig. = 0.00), and individual's education ( $r = -0.12$ , Sig. = 0.01), meaning that the more the level of parents' and individual's education rises, the more likely her belief declines concerning gender norms. This can be explained by the fact that as parents' and individual's education promotes, her awareness declines toward discrimination of these norms. This finding is in accordance with gender sociability theory and confirms Bar's statement (2004: 65) saying that appropriate gender behavior is directly or indirectly encouraged by parents, teachers, and peers.

The results of step-by-step regression in path analysis show that, among all independent and interface variables in the model, two variables including presence in public places (Beta= 0.25) and acceptance level of sexual harassment (Beta= -0.14) were directly found to influence sexual harassment experience in that the strongest path belongs to variable of presence in public places.



According to the value of  $R^2 = 0.12$ , the model determines 12 % of dependent variable changes, sexual harassment experience.

According to the findings, despite the dominant idea in community saying that women are blamed for street harassment, presence of women in public places and acceptance level of gender norms determining women behavior in public places determines only 12 % of street harassment. Thus, the reason of another 88 per cent must be looked for somewhere else.

Finally, since most studies are conducted with women population concerning sexual harassment and men are the agent and women are the victims, it is proposed to select men population in futures researches in order to study the reasons of sexual harassment in public places.

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